

# Old Guard soldiers train Djiboutian army warrior skills

Story and photos by Spc. Eric M. McKeeby

**ARTA, Djibouti**—Soldiers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard," Bravo Company, recently completed two weeks of infantry combat fundamentals training here, with soldiers of the Djiboutian army's Rapid Reaction Force and Republican Guard.

The training, which ended Jan. 24 and included checkpoint operations, anti-terrorism force protection, close quarters combat and marksmanship, was part of Bravo Co.'s mission supporting the Global War on Terrorism in its deployment to the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

First Lt. Richard J. Bardsley, executive officer for Bravo Co., said the training is an important contribution to regional stability and self-defense, both of which he said are essential to combating terrorism.

"It's important that we help facilitate a military structure that was not previously in place to help combat trans-national terrorist networks from operating and passing through the Djiboutian region," said Bardsley.

The mil-to-mil training, as it is referred to by soldiers here, began with a week of classroom instruction for the Djiboutian soldiers. The soldiers were instructed through French and Somali-language translators and instruction booklets on the essentials of defending their nation against terror threats.

"The level-one classes give a good foundation for dealing with terrorist activity," said 1st Lt. Scott J. Porter, leader of the Bravo Co. platoon that engaged in the training.

Following the week of classes, Bravo Co. soldiers spent a week in the field at sites in and around Arta, Djibouti, engaging in practical training exercises with commissioned and non-commissioned officers from the rapid reaction force and republican guard.

The field exercises with leaders from the Djiboutian army, called "train the trainer" training, enable future training in the absence of Bravo Co., Bardsley said.

"That will allow them to continue training to a standard without us actually being there," Bardsley said.

During one portion of the field exercises, Bravo Co. set up a checkpoint operations rehearsal, a tactical skill Porter said is necessary for Djibouti's taking on terrorism.

"Checkpoint operations is something that's very relevant to now," Porter said. "At any given time they have a company on their borders."

The week of field exercises also included reflexive fire marksmanship, close quarters battle and military operations in urban terrain.

During the reflexive fire portion of the training, soldiers from each country trained with weapons from the other country. Djiboutian soldiers were



(Above) Soldiers from the Djiboutian army watch as soldiers from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard", Bravo Company, fire M4s in a reflexive fire training on a range in rural Djibouti. Bravo Co. soldiers spent several days training with the Djiboutian army on a number of infantry skills, one of Bravo Co.'s missions as part of a deployment to the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. (Below) Soldiers from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard," Bravo Co., show a soldier from the Djiboutian army how to fire an M-240 G machine gun, Jan. 20, 2004.

able to gain familiarity with and fire Bravo Co. weapons, including M4 carbine rifles and M-240 G machine guns, and Old Guard soldiers trained with Djiboutian AK-47s.

Porter said understanding the AK-47 is essential in fighting the GWOT.

"It's the predominant weapon in the region," Porter said. "You need to know everything about the region. It's important for the soldiers to know who they're dealing with, not just the Djiboutians and our other allies."

Spc. Keith A. McDonald, a Bravo Co. rifleman who participated in the training, said he found the AK-47 familiarization beneficial. "We shot in different positions. It was a good opportunity to shoot a different weapon outside of the U.S. arsenal," McDonald said.

Despite language differences, McDonald said he was able to communicate training messages to the Djiboutians through translators and demonstrations.

"It was basically a show-and-tell," McDonald said. "We showed them, and if we needed to tell them something, we brought the translator over."

McDonald said the Djiboutian soldiers were attentive and dedicated throughout the training.

"They were eager to learn. They stayed motivated the whole time, always wanting to get in and do it," McDonald said.

Porter agreed the Djiboutian soldiers were motivated, and said he was impressed by their attentiveness, which he said was shown in the quality of questions Djiboutian soldiers asked following the training.

"They were the cream of the crop from the Djiboutian military," Porter said. "These guys were



disciplined, attentive and, even with the language barrier, they were quick learners."

After the conclusion of the two weeks of training, a ceremony was held Jan. 25 at a Djiboutian army base in Arta. At the ceremony Marine Col. John M. Clapp, deputy of operations for CJTF-HOA, awarded the Djiboutian soldiers certificates for completing the training.

"We are pleased to share our nation's best with your nation's best and look forward to continuing this honor," Clapp said at the ceremony.

Col. Omar Bouh, the fourth-most senior officer in the Djiboutian army, addressed the ceremony's audience through a translator upon the conclusion of Clapp's speech.

"Thank you for selecting your best guys for the training of the Djiboutian army," Bouh said.

"The training will continue until we achieve the main objective," Bouh added. "Right now we have the same objective main objective is how to fight terrorists."